

## STAFF REPORT

August 16, 2013

### Proposal:

The Parks and Recreation Dept. proposes improvements to the streetscape in the public right-of-way of Goodhue Blvd., between F and G Streets.

### Discussion:

On July 25, 2013, the Commission received proposals from Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department for improvements on Goodhue Blvd., including a sidewalk replacement on the west side, tree removal and replanting on the west side, and tree planting on the east side. Three alternatives were offered proposing relocation of the sidewalk and the removal of two, one, or zero large oak trees.

The Commission also heard testimony from residents, property owners, and other citizens concerned with various aspects of the plan. Lynn Johnson, director of Parks Dept., proposed a public meeting for further input on the improvements and the Commission tabled the matter until that meeting could be held. Letters and emails have been received on the matter and shared with the Commission.

Last evening (Aug. 15) a well-attended meeting was held at McPhee School, sponsored by Parks & Recreation Dept.

Attached is Lynn Johnson's memorandum reporting on these efforts and recommending a fourth alternative, that the sidewalk be repaired and made ADA compliant in its current alignment, that the current tree line between sidewalk and curb be retained. He recommends Greenspire Lindens for planting on the east (McPhee) side of the street, and as the "in-fill" tree between and north of the existing oaks. He is consulting with the south property owner regarding the two Autumn Purple Ash trees near the south end of the block, recommending that they be replaced with Greenspire Lindens so that most of trees on both sides of the street have a generally uniform size and form. He recommends selection of the linden as a transitional form between the ash trees in the G-H block and the oaks and other varieties further south.

The background of this improvement project dates back to 1986. Two years before the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission was created in 1988, City Council adopted the "Nebraska Capitol Environs East and South Mall Plan" in Nov. 1986—a master plan for J Street and what became Goodhue Blvd. The plan is available on-line at

<http://lincoln.ne.gov/city/plan/boards/ncec/reports/2010/capenv1986.pdf>

Among the concepts for "South Mall" was a switch of the sidewalk and tree-line locations, with the sidewalks moving inward towards the centerline to about 12 feet back of curb, and the tree-line being re-established between sidewalk and buildings, within the wide 120' right-of-way. The plan stated *"In addition to creating a larger front lawn space between the sidewalk and buildings, this relocation also widens the mall 'corridor' created by the trees lining each side of the street and accommodates the full spread of the mature trees without excessive branching over the street proper..."*

Other South Mall concepts included ornamental streetlights, removal of trees from the medians, variations of tree species along the length of the mall *"to provide a gradation of summer and winter color from 'A' Street to the Capitol at 'H' Street. This change in plant variety not only allows for a pleasant visual transition along the mall but also will help prevent disease problems (e.g., Dutch Elm*

*Disease) from spreading the entire length of the landscaped mall.” Street closures were proposed at ‘C’ and ‘E’ “and perhaps at ‘B’ and ‘F’ with cul-de-sacs and mini-parks.*

Finally, the plan suggested *“It should be noted that street closures as proposed are a long range improvement and would follow the City’s established policy for neighborhood input. Further, the success of the overall mall plans is not dependent upon approval of all or any one specific element proposed. These documents are intended to be conceptual in nature and therefore individual design elements are subject to change.”* (Emphasis added.)

When the Commission was created in the 1988 and design standards were proposed, the 1986 Plan was incorporated by a statement *“The ‘South and East Mall Plan’ approved by City Council in 1986 provides general guidance to the development of the public landscape of this Mall.”* (Emphasis added.) Furthermore, Guideline 24.5 states *“New sidewalks should align with north end, and be a uniform width of six feet.”*

That Plan and the Design Standards are reflected in various improvements carried out since the mid-1980s—the simplification of the center medians to turf, the decorative street lights from A-H, the new sidewalks, removal of oaks and planting of Autumn Purple Ash trees on the G-H (Governor’s Mansion) block, and “clean up” of the east side of Goodhue from G-F in association with the McPhee School renovations.

In 2010 the Parks Department reassessed the condition of trees along Goodhue and met with the Commission to propose a gradual replacement and infill program, leaving the tree-line and sidewalk locations as they then existed, at least from A to F Streets. My report for that meeting is on line at <http://lincoln.ne.gov/city/plan/boards/ncec/reports/2010/100826.pdf>  
(Item 2, pages 1 & 2)

Discussion included mention that realignment of the sidewalks was less important south of F Street. Minutes of the August 26, 2010 meeting noted *“[Mark] Canney stated that most of the trees are pin oaks. They are going to salvage the oaks that are in good standing. From A to H Streets, they are proposing lindens on the McPhee [G-F] block, maple on the next block, then sugar maples, red oaks, lindens and maples again.”*

The action recorded at that meeting was to approve the plan from A to F Streets *“and to entertain further planning from F to G Streets and include LES, LPS & Public Works in those discussions.”*

The minutes for that meeting are on-line at <http://lincoln.ne.gov/city/plan/boards/ncec/minutes/2010/100826.pdf>

The next month (Sept. 2010) the Commission reviewed and approved the “design concepts and scope” for the McPhee School renovation, work which commenced in 2011. The McPhee site-work included a sidewalk relocated to align with the sidewalk north of G Street.

The current recommendation of Parks Department incorporates the 1986 Master Plan concept of varying tree species block-by-block for variety of form, color, and disease resistance. The emerging problem of emerald ash borers bears out the wisdom of that element of the 1986 plan. The recommendation applies the logic of the 2010 decision to forego major shifts of sidewalks and treelines, to allow a more continual and incremental replacement of trees as necessary. Eventually, upon the natural demise of the two west oak trees, lindens could be installed in their place. The proposal improves pedestrian accessibility, but does not create matching alignments on the east and west sides of this block. The difference would be

perceptible, but probably would not strongly affect a pedestrian's experience from either sidewalk, or a north-bound driver's experience.

Recommended finding: *The proposed improvements of sidewalk and tree planting between F and G Streets considerably enhance the Capitol Environs and will add to visitors' enjoyment of Capitol vistas. They are generally consistent with broad concepts of the 1986 Master Plan for "South Mall" and subsequent Commission decisions, especially of August 2010.*

Recommended action: *Approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for the Parks Department recommendation of August 16, 2013.*

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